



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 11, 2013

Pro-Life Movement Gaining Momentum after 40 Years of *Roe v. Wade*

When Trevin Wax wrote in *Baptist Press News* back in July 2011 that “[the pro-life movement is winning](#),” he likely had no idea that [Time magazine would one day agree with him](#). With the cover of its current issue declaring that “40 Years Ago, Abortion Rights Activists Won an Epic Victory with *Roe v. Wade*, They’ve Been Losing Ever Since,” Kate Pickert backs up the claim by noting that 24 states have adopted more than 90 new restrictions on abortions just since 2010, and then adds,



These laws make it harder every year to exercise a right heralded as a crowning achievement of the 20th century women’s movement. In addition to North Dakota, three other states — South Dakota, Mississippi and Arkansas — have just one surgical-abortion clinic in operation. The number of abortion providers nationwide shrank from 2,908 in 1982 to 1,793 in 2008, the latest year for which data is available.

Getting an abortion in America is, in some places, harder today than at any point since it became a constitutionally protected right 40 years ago this month.

She laments the success of pro-life activists in getting parental notification laws adopted along with waiting periods and counseling before an abortion can be performed. Funding of abortion under Medicaid has been eliminated in 30 states, and the shift in sentiment from pro-choice to pro-life among citizens is accelerating. [She notes a study by Gallup](#) that shows just 41 percent of Americans now consider themselves to be pro-choice while 50 percent call themselves pro-life. This is a tectonic shift from just eight years ago when those numbers were reversed. She also noted that pro-life activists are now young, white, female, and persuasive. As Lisa Miller wrote [at The Washington Post](#), there is a “new vitality [in] the anti-abortion [pro-life] movement ... the most visible, entrepreneurial and passionate advocates for the rights of the unborn ... are women. More to the point: They are youngish Christian working mothers with children at home.”

She contrasts them with the older generation of pro-life activists who have faded from the scene:

These women represent a major strategic shift in the abortion war, and not just because they are generally more likable than the old, white fathers of the antiabortion movement: Jerry Falwell, Henry Hyde, Jesse Helms and Pat Robertson...

Their approach to working and mothering — “I’m just doing the best I can, like you” — also reverses decades of harsh judgments from such female leaders on the right as Beverly LaHaye and Phyllis Schlafly.

It’s a much softer sell, and it’s working. Miller interviewed [Marjorie Dannenfelser](#) who heads up the [Susan B. Anthony List](#) (SBA List), a political action group dedicated to eliminating abortion in the United States. With 365,000 members, her message is winsome and relatable. When Miller asked her



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how she manages her five children along with the responsibilities at SBA List, Dannenfesler responded, "It's not a very neat exercise ... child care is, you know ... I get someone to help when I have to."

Miller also noted that the new leaders in the pro-life movement are well-educated. Dannenfesler received a degree from Duke University while [Charmaine Yoest](#), president of [Americans United for Life](#), earned a Ph.D. in politics at the University of Virginia. What unites Dannenfesler and Yoest and other leaders in the movement such as Shannon Royce of Chosen Families, Kristan Hawkins of Students for Life, and Penny Nance, head of Concerned Women for America is, to Miller's surprise, that each of them are Christians.

This, says Miller, touches the abortion issue at its core: the belief that abortion is morally wrong. And more and more Americans agree. According to Gallup, [51 percent of those polled](#) think abortion is morally wrong. But more importantly, when those between 18 and 34 — [the Millennials](#) — were asked if they considered abortion morally wrong, 53 percent said yes, and 24 percent said they considered abortion to be "illegal in all circumstances," significantly higher than the older cohorts Gallup quizzed.

Pickert, in her article in *Time*, also interviewed [Frances Kissling](#), an ardent abortion advocate, about the shift in attitudes about abortion. Said Kissling, "When people hear us say abortion is just another medical procedure, they react with shock. Abortion is not like having your tooth pulled or having your appendix out. It involves the termination of an early form of human life. That deserves some gravitas."

That gravitas is being helped along by technology. [As Fred Barnes noted in *The Weekly Standard*](#), "pro-lifers have captured the high moral ground, chiefly thanks to advances in the quality of sonograms. Once fuzzy, sonograms now provide a high-resolution picture of the unborn child in the womb. Fetuses have become babies."

And this is impacting the youngest generation in ways that Gallup has yet to measure. When pictures of an unborn sibling are pasted on the refrigerator, brothers and sisters are much less likely to consider aborting the fetus as a "medical procedure" and much more as the taking of a human life. That's going to be increasingly difficult for the pro-choice crowd to overcome.

[Gary Bauer](#), head of American Values and chairman of the Campaign for Working Families, says that pro-choice advocates "will have a difficult time claiming any kind of victory" since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The reason? [Writes Bauer](#),

An important reason why "pro-life" is winning is the mounting evidence revealing the humanity of the unborn child. Taken together, developments in science belie the pro-choice assertion that an unborn child is nothing more than a clump of cells.

There's the study from Pacific Lutheran University that revealed that babies can learn individual speech sounds while still in the womb. McGill University has found that babies in the womb can "wake up" in response to certain sounds, including their mother's voice. And other studies, says Bauer, show that unborn babies can remember musical rhythms after they are born.

Perhaps the most astonishing discovery is that unborn babies can feel pain as early as 20 weeks into pregnancy, which has resulted in nine states adopting "pain awareness" laws with many more states considering them.

Trevin Wax must be pleased that his prediction from nearly two years ago is coming true. He concluded,

Those who continue to ignore or deny the humanity of the unborn are increasingly on the defensive because new technologies are opening the window into the womb. What we find there are not



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tissues to be discarded, but human lives worth protecting.

All of this — the moral reawakening of Americans, the persuasive evidence from science that an unborn child is not just a “clump of cells” that the mother can conveniently discard, the influence of people of faith in the battle — is showing up in increasing legislation designed to protect the unborn from harm. Forty-three pro-life laws were enacted in 2011, second only to the 92 pro-life laws enacted the year before.

And that reawakening is having a direct effect on the number of abortions. As Randy O’Bannon, director of research for the National Right To Life Committee, [said](#),

Over the past twenty years ... we have seen that pro-life efforts can make a difference, as the number of abortions performed in the U.S. has declined from 1.6 million to 1.2 million a year.

We’ve still got a long way to go, obviously, but we see that pro-life legislation, education, and outreach can save and has saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Our task is great, but our cause is just.

That’s worth celebrating as the war that was started by the Supreme Court’s grievously-flawed decision, [Roe v. Wade](#), enters its 41st year.

Photo of pro-life protesters: AP Images

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